



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS RECYCLING AND DISPOSAL FACILITY

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A Golden Anniversary for Wellesley Recycling

February 19, 2021 (Wellesley, MA) – Recycling in Wellesley began 50 years ago this month with a few glass jars and a determined group of environmentally-minded residents. From its modest start to a program that is now state-of-the art, recycling has become a daily habit for so many citizens and a key money-maker for the Town.

According to Town archives, in late 1970 resident Martha Stone thought of the idea to start glass recycling in Wellesley after reading about a similar program in California. Stone, fellow resident Roselyn Coleman, and a few others founded a group called Action for Ecology to brainstorm ways to improve the local ecology. Members settled on the idea of collecting glass bottles, jars, and other containers and taking them to a nearby Coca-Cola plant where they would be paid a small fee. The group persuaded Wellesley's then dump supervisor Everett Kennedy to set aside a small area where residents could bring their glass items. The new program was advertised in *The Wellesley Townsman* and kicked off on February 11, 1971.

Wellesley resident Mary Ann Cluggish, a founding member of Action for Ecology, still remembers that first day. "Every time I go to the RDF I think back to that cold February morning sitting at what was then called the dump when we began the recycling program in 1971. We were there at all hours to answer questions, wrote articles for the newspapers, gave talks at schools, found the markets, hired the trucks, and did everything we could think of for over a year in our complete dedication to making the program successful," she said. "It is still one of the most gratifying things I've ever done. I hope Wellesley will always continue to be a leader in sustainability."

Glass recycling was so popular that within a few weeks, plywood bins were built to contain the glass, and shortly after that, the overflowing bins were replaced by large dumpsters. Three months after launching the glass program, Action for Ecology added newspaper and can recycling. In that first year, residents recycled more than 752 tons of four or five different types of material.

Fifty years later, while some recycling is still collected in dumpsters, the dump is now Wellesley's high-tech Recycling and Disposal Facility (RDF). Its resource recovery model is respected and used as an example worldwide with residents recycling materials ranging from glass, plastic, and aluminum to mattresses, appliances, yard waste and more. In 2020 alone, Wellesley recycled 418 tons of glass.

"The community's commitment to source separated recycling fuels the success of our program which diverts nearly 5,000 tons from the landfill every year. The combined efforts and support of residents, volunteers, elected officials, and staff help make the RDF a leader in municipal recycling and a pretty special place," said Department of Public Works Director Dave Cohen.

Recycling has come a long way since those first glass products 50 years ago. In 2020, Wellesley recycled 418 tons of glass alone. In the half-century since the program began, those initial small fees paid to the Town have grown to more than \$10 million in total revenue.

“Recycling has become a foundation for the Wellesley community and I am humbled to be part of it,” said RDF Superintendent Jamie Manzolini. “The RDF team is continually exploring the newest technologies to ensure that Wellesley can continue to process recyclable material in the most beneficial way possible, both environmentally and financially.”

Recyclable of the Month

To mark the golden anniversary of Wellesley recycling, the Town is planning activities to involve residents and businesses in this milestone celebration. “I invite all residents to celebrate this 50th anniversary and join the recycling team to help make our program even better,” said Cohen.

Starting now and continuing throughout the year, take part in the RDF Recyclable of the Month (ROM) program which features a specific recyclable product each month and facts about why these items should be recycled. This month, in a throwback to 1971, the Recyclable of the Month is glass. “Glass recycling is one of the simplest ways to help our environment. It’s 100 percent recyclable and doesn’t lose quality or purity. Recycling this material is efficient and sustainable – for every ton of glass recycled, more than a ton of natural resources are saved,” said Manzolini.

Watch for [ROM program flyers](#) at the RDF and join the Town in spreading the news about the 50th Anniversary. For more information, visit the [RDF webpages](#) on the Town website, [email](#) the DPW, or contact the RDF directly at 781-235-7600 ext. 3345.

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